

Bob Etheridge statement on health care reform

“The working families of the 2nd District need solutions, not more fear, neither the real fears of rising cost nor the false fears spread by special interests. We cannot continue to allow the current system to kill jobs and bust the budgets of our families and our nation. After reading the bill carefully, I have concluded that it will save lives and save money. I have listened to North Carolinians from all points of view and after prayerful consideration, I will vote “yes” for these needed reforms. This is the best chance we have to reduce sky-rocketing health care cost for North Carolina families.

“North Carolinians know that the current system is broken and that we need common sense reform. For me, the effort to fix our health care system has always been about people not about politics. Our effort is about North Carolina families. We need reform for folks who are struggling with unbearable health care costs, rapidly rising premiums, bureaucratic meddling, and arbitrary denials of coverage and a system that is driving our nation deeper and deeper into debt.

“Throughout this process, I have been listening to thousands of folks from the main streets and country roads of North Carolina who are crying out for help. I’ve held numerous town hall meetings in North Carolina as well as telephone town hall meetings and other opportunities to speak directly to North Carolinians. I read thousands of messages that come in by phone, email, fax, or letter every day. The vast majority say that change is needed, but there is wide and heated disagreement about how to make that change happen.

“When North Carolina families are hurting, doing nothing really is not an option for me. I have said all along that there are several goals that our efforts must meet to improve security and stability for North Carolinians. We need to reform health insurance to reduce costs for people who have insurance and those who cannot afford it. We need to increase consumer choices and end insurance company abuses that keep folks from getting the benefits they deserve. We need to shore up Medicare to improve security for seniors, reducing costs for medications and eliminating copayments. We need to make insurance affordable for businesses, so that they are not faced with the choice of providing coverage for their employees or staying in the black. Finally, we must put discipline back in the budget and bring down the budget deficit.

“These principles are not abstract. They rise up from the voices I hear in North Carolina and the people whose lives have been harmed by the current system.

“Folks like a nurse from Sanford, North Carolina, who says that insurance industry bureaucrats are keeping her from providing her patients the care they need.

“Folks like a woman from Raleigh, who fears she will suffer the same fate as her sister who died from asthma because she could not get insurance coverage.

“Folks like a man from Louisburg, who cannot start a new business because he needs the insurance his current employer provides. His mother pleaded with me that they are not looking for a handout, just a fair playing field.

“Folks like a woman from Rocky Mount, who notes that the working poor, self-employed, part-time workers and others on the margins need relief. She called on me to not let the insurance companies win this time.

“These are the real stories from real people that I measure my vote against. A lot of folks are afraid, both of the current system and of potential changes. Thousands of families without insurance, and individuals with pre-existing conditions, are an illness away from financial ruin. Reform needs to provide them security.

“Yesterday, the House released the final version of the health reform bill that we expect to be voting on this weekend. I spent the last 24 hours reading through the bill, and measured it against my goals for reform and the stories and messages I have received from my fellow North Carolinians. Although it is not perfect, the bill does substantially meet those principles and will be good for North Carolina families.

“As we continue to address America’s financial situation, health reform is absolutely necessary to get our economy growing again. This bill will reduce the stranglehold that insurance costs have on our small businesses and eliminate the threat of bankruptcy due to medical costs that hangs over so many North Carolina families. It will strengthen our rural communities, supporting the training of doctors and providing incentives for them to work in underserved areas. And the bill is fully paid for, so that not only will it bring down costs for individuals and businesses, but for the taxpayer and future generations.

“It is a good bill, and I am proud to announce my support of this legislation today.”